

Seventh Annual

**EXHIBITION OF ANTIQUE FOLK ART**

At Robert Young Antiques  
68 Battersea Bridge Road, Battersea  
London SW11 3AG

**Friday 12<sup>th</sup> May - Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2006**

PRESS RELEASE

In the spring of 1951 Margaret Lambert and Enid Marx ended the Preface of their pioneering book entitled 'English Popular Art' with the following words:

*"The 'innocent eye' is disappearing in England, not, we think, entirely due to mechanisation, but rather from changing social habits, bringing a certain lack of initiative and interest in things with a distinctive individual character. As the countryside becomes more urbanised and we buy more from chain stores, the country craftsmen are dying out and with them that individuality in design and decoration that gave life to old popular art. This is not a thing that can be artificially revived; to try to do so would be to get the antithesis of the genuine tradition. But by preserving examples from the past for study and enjoyment we may, through our designers of the future, possibly regain some of the old individual qualities and delight in simple forms."*

This, our Seventh Annual Exhibition, will be showing some 80 or 90 selected pieces of historic naïve and Folk Art, (of which 32 are illustrated and described in the Catalogue.) Since our first Exhibition the interest and demand for these works has grown enormously. Much has recently been published by contemporary art scholars, about the inspiration and influence of works from the Folk Art tradition, naïve and popular art, primitive art, self-taught art and outsider art on the development of Twentieth Century mainstream art and the relationship between them. This has in turn raised the profile, standing and appreciation of the long neglected body of work from these various 'schools' and the heritage of artistic expression that they represent.

Works of Folk Art frequently incorporate exciting textures, striking silhouettes, bold colours and engaging graphics, that are increasingly understood and valued by a 'gallery going' generation that has become familiar with and appreciative of modern and abstract art and who are conscious of light, space, colour and materials within contemporary architecture and interior design and are sensitive to these qualities. There is something inherently original and unique about these vernacular pieces, a timelessness, an integrity and a quirky, touching quality. The antique and vintage pieces which make up this forthcoming Exhibition, are created from a



variety of media and take many different forms, yet they are somehow bound and unified by a common aesthetic quality. Created by largely untrained, (though not necessarily unskilled), artisans, craftsmen and artists, who were invariably free from the constraints of classical proportions, academic perspective and observed figurative realism. They have a simple, direct honesty about them that is inexplicably enhanced by their history and age.

In Frank Maresca and Roger Ricco's excellent 2002 publication 'American Vernacular, New Discoveries in Folk, Self-Taught and Outsider Sculpture', Margit Rowell (a former Curator at The Guggenheim and MoMA in New York and at The Centre Pompidou in Paris) wrote an enlightening Foreword entitled 'Familiar, yet somehow unfamiliar' in which she said: "*Beneath the grass roots vernacular and the rudimentary techniques of a piece of Folk Sculpture, there is a sense of magic; one might even say an archaic human voice.*"

Many of the pieces in this Exhibition somehow endorse this sentiment. Examples include an engaging small Eighteenth Century English Bow Fronted Corner Cupboard (*Catalogue Item 1*) naively painted with a whimsical landscape incorporating details including village houses and a church, a courting couple and their dog, a group of children and a shepherdess with her sheep. The bold composition and disregard of perspective have a particular charm and also reflect the "*sense of magic*" and the "*archaic human voice*" to which Margit Rowell refers. An otherwise simple mid Seventeenth Century English Boarded Chest (*Catalogue Item 24*) is decorated on its front panel with scratch carvings depicting two stylised cockerels flanking the initials 'I W', which have a particular vitality, confidence and freedom of execution and simplicity of motif that further echo these qualities yet also have much in common with the spirit of some early Twentieth Century mainstream art.

There are many other beguiling, sensitive and curious pieces on show which will include a massive hand carved full bodied Salmon, originally made as a Scottish Fishmonger's trade sign, Ceremonial Drinking Vessels with roots going back into the Viking Tradition, Love Tokens in various forms, including a Four Fold Screen hand painted with Love Doves and Heart Motifs (*Catalogue Item 15*), Love spoons, Wool baskets and a sensitively paint decorated Courting Mirror (*Catalogue Item 23*): Hand carved and painted wooden Toys: a magnificent Iron bound and brightly painted Swedish Marriage Chest (*Catalogue Item 25*) with the bride's initials and dated 1820: an engaging naive Woolwork Picture of a Cat : an imposing primitive Portrait of a Seated Gentleman (*Catalogue Item 32*), Naive Marine and Landscape Paintings, Trade and Tavern Signs, intriguing early Lighting Devices, needlework and weavings, rural, provincial tavern and farmhouse furniture; hand carved and painted decoys and other birds, each with a story to tell and as Robert Young says: "*selected for their integrity, line, colour, texture and presence.*" Great pieces of Folk Art are "*sometimes raw, neglected and patinated by nature. Sometimes rich, treasured and patinated by years of handling and care. Sometimes sensitive, intimate and poignant. Sometimes quirky, wild, colourful and alive. But almost by definition pieces from the untutored school of vernacular Folk Art are unique, individual and honest*" says Robert Young "*and often make you smile.*"

Andras Kalman, a pioneering collector and dealer in English and European Folk Art wrote in his 2003 Foreword to the Catalogue of a Touring Exhibition of a magnificent private collection of



Naïve Paintings: *"In the British Isles and Scandinavia we are sometimes lucky enough to unearth primitive art objects. Deceptively simple yet startlingly original."* And to end her eminent introduction to the same catalogue Laura Wortley wrote in 2003: *"Naive, Folk or Popular Art is universal. Unpretentious and organic, it belongs to no one place or time, although paradoxically as these paintings show each item eloquently speaks of its own place and time. As Noel Carrington wrote in 1945, it is simply '...art practised by artists of the people for the enjoyment of the people.'* "

All items in the Exhibition will be for sale although nothing will be sold prior to the Private View at 6.30pm on Thursday 11th May. Last year's Exhibition was a huge success with enthusiasts queuing from lunchtime and telephoning steadily from the opening at 6.30pm in an attempt to secure their chosen pieces from the illustrated Catalogue, which will be available from 28th April by calling the Gallery.